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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Spring is officially here even though the weather doesn't seem to want to agree with the calendar! We've had a few "above-average" days this past week; I have the sprouting flowers to prove it. Still, I can't wait until the thermometer stays above 50 degrees for the day! My golf clubs are screaming to be brought outside; and the pool is just waiting to be opened. And the yard is looking like it needs a ton of work getting back into shape! What did you think, all was going to be fun and games?!

Anyway, it's hard to believe that we're already into our fourth issue already. Former Atari bigwig, and currently with VM Labs, Don Thomas dropped me an e-mail earlier in the week. He essentially wrote me that now that we have three issues in a row under our belt, we're officially here now! I'm still trying to decide if that was a compliment!

We've begun work on our Atari software/hardware databases. I'm supposed to be working on the worldwide Atari dealer/vendor list, but I was a little side-tracked this past week so I didn't make any progress on that track. But, we'll get there! There's going to be a lot of time and effort to do the research on our objectives to get the job done right.

Meanwhile, please feel free to send us dealer or Atari vendor information to us (mail to dpj@delphi.com). At the least, send an e-mail or web site address for any dealer and we'll contact them for details. Don't be concerned that you feel we may already have the information - send it our way anyway. Sometimes the most obvious is the first overlooked! <g>

Michael Burkley is still sick (get well, Michael!). I don't even think he's been online at all this past week, so I don't think we'll be seeing his column this week. Albert Dayes was planning to be back this week with his column, but I think he fell asleep at his keyboard! <grin> Hopefully, we'll see both Michael and Albert next week.

So, let's get on with this week's issue, shall we!

Until next time...

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Calamus News

From: "Paal Monstad" <pmonstad@online.no>

Dear Calamus user.

The Calamus originator company (DMC) no longer exists. MGI from Canada, the successor, decided in December 1998 to cancel all development and distribution of MGI Calamus Digital Publisher v2 (CP2) for Windows.

We know that many of you who get this mailing have been waiting patiently for the new native Windows Calamus and therefore have ignored all information about the original SL version of Calamus. We are still developing and expanding Calamus SL here in Germany, but many of you

believed that Calamus SL is old Atari stuff.

When MGI decided to not bring CP2 to the high end publishing market, we asked ourselves how we could help those of you who want to continue working with Calamus under Windows. We had no chance of translating the Atari Calamus in such a short time to Windows, and this would have made no sense at all because of the almost finished but cancelled CP2. Instead we found a way that you can use Calamus SL99 directly under Windows: A tiny invisible, non-intrusive emulator does the trick. The most important fact is that you can finally use the latest version of Calamus, take profit from our great variety of optional modules, and of course use your Windows system printer drivers.

If the above sounds strange to you because you are a long time SL user who does not work with the Windows version of Calamus, be assured that SL99 still works with all relevant TOS systems (Atari TT, Falcon, Medusa, Hades, Milan etc.) - and much better with MagiCMac on Apple computers.

MGI Calamus SL99 works with all relevant TOS systems (Atari, Medusa, Hades, Milan), on Apple computers (G3, PPC or Mac with MagiCMac), and with Windows95/98/NT (emulator included!).

SL99 is the actual Calamus for all platforms with only one document format for Mac, Windows and Atari! The Windows pack version comes with an embedded emulator, allowing you to use SL99 with no additional installation trouble. Now as before, we spend much energy in fixing old bugs and implementing new features. It is most important for us that Calamus is stable; this version has a degree of stability much greater than previous versions.

We recommend SL99 to all Calamus users who decided not to upgrade before. SL99 Calamus gives you many enhanced functions and lets you create your documents with even more powerful and professional tools.

Here are the most important new features (since 1995):

- Old SL and Windows Calamus documents can be loaded.
- Very important for Win95: SL does not need a Transparency module.
- All dialogs have been modernized.
- The Mask Module is integrated in the Frame Module.
- ScaleIt for text frames is embedded in the Frame Module.

The most important new features since SL98:

- Automatic Esthetic Text Justification: Some characters may now reach over the right resp. left border of the block text, according to their weight to give the appearance of an optically smoothed text block.
- SuperScript/SubScript: Position and size can be defined now.
- New text ruler type: Grid Raster. Now you may set your text very simply in perfect base line registers (even with more than one register on each page!).
- All kinds of frame types may be anchored in text frames directly from the clip board, when you work in text edit mode.
- 3D dialogs (when using a multitasking AES like MagiC...)
- Redesigned frame handling (copy frames when dragging them with the mouse, new mouse pointer forms for visual replies etc.)
- Calculation functions in coordinates dialog (+ - / * ^ and brackets)
- You may change image frames between all available color schemes

finally, to and from: Monochrome, Grey, Grey (Palette), RGB, RGB (Palette), CYMK.
Frames can be placed beside documents in the document frame, but visibly. Very interesting as an alternative work area.
New GEM Import driver in standard package.
Completely redesigned dialog handling: All dialog objects can be reached by keyboard, similar to MS Windows.
All lists in dialogs can be reached (scrolled, selected) by keyboard.
Raster CacheGenerator can be called from Print dialog.
Raster CacheGenerator can be switched off on the fly, giving access to the built in Ordered Dithering Raster (very good for InkJet printers).
You can optionally Save Settings automatically when quitting Calamus.

The most important new features since SL99:

Type 1 Fontloader: Besides CFN fonts, you may finally use Type 1 PostScript fonts in Calamus directly. Both PC (suffix PFB) and Macintosh format are supported. (Calamus SL99 cannot load TrueType fonts yet!)
You may save your SL99 documents with embedded fonts (no waste of time any more when searching fonts for reload of documents!).
Define double clicks in document windows (e.g. a double click in a text frame may call the text editor Eddie).
When moving text ruler Tabs, a vertical help line is shown now.
The module panels are placed in real windows.
The Create Frame mode is no longer the default, so you do not have to click the right mouse button for mode changes that often as before.
Preview available, first of all for fonts and some image formats (document and module preview still under process).
Images can be decompressed when Fixing Document.
Help Text color can be defined now.
Calamus SL no longer has a general print resolution limit.

Additional modules/drivers in the SL99 package:

Text Editor EDDIE light
Control Curve Editor FrankLIN light
Histogramme Module
GDPS Module
Gridplay Module
HKS Palette Module
Toolbox PLUS
Preview Modules
inverse Barcode Generator Module
Imposition Module light (Output limited to 720 dpi)
Raster CacheGenerator, very enhanced features and handling
Pling Module (optional bell signal after printing)
GIF 89a Import driver
Megapaint BLD Import driver
JPEG Import driver
Photoshop EPS Import driver
Kodak PhotoCD Import driver
General Two User Licence (for 1 SL Serial # in a single location).

Calamus SL lives in three worlds!

Since MGI cancelled the development of Calamus for Windows, only one Calamus is available: SL is solid and well established.

Only one document format for all three platforms! There are no exchange problems any longer between Calamus for Windows and Calamus for Apple and Atarr. Here are explanations to help you discover which upgrade version fits your needs best. You can use SL99 on three different platforms:

Atari Computers:

If your Atari computer (Milan, Hades, TT, Falcon etc.) has at least 4 MB RAM, a screen resolution of 640x480 or more (monochrome, 16 c, 256 c or TrueColor) and at least 10 MB free space on hard disk, simply start with the upgrade as is. Please choose the SL99 TOS Pack.

Apple Computers:

Please choose the SL99 MacPack. Important: MagiCMac and NVDI are required for usage of Calamus SL and are not included in the upgrade price! If you did not use Calamus on your Mac previously, please order MagiCMac/NVDI too. You get a high speed complete TOS emulator for MacOS and will be able to use other Atari software in addition to Calamus SL on your Mac.

Windows95/98/NT:

For Windows you will find a great variety of combinations Please stop to check which of the following types best fits your needs. IF:

1.You worked with Calamus for Windows previously and want to crossgrade to Calamus SL99 on your Windows PC? - Please choose the SL99 Windows Pack.
2.You already own a TOS emulator for Windows and want to use other Atari software with it? - Please choose the SL99 TOS Pack.
3.You do not have a TOS emulator and do want to use other Atari software beside Calamus on your Windows PC? - Please choose the SL99 Windows Pack and the upgrade to the STEmulator GOLD version. You get a modern TOS emulator with MultiTasking (MultiTOS), enhanced VDI and a pretty Desktop (Thing) included, which fits to your Windows system. - The alternative at even higher speed, but also at higher costs, is the new release of MagiCPC with NVDI.
4.You want a TOS emulator for Windows and would like to use Calamus SL99 with your Atari and/or Apple computer, too? - Please choose the SL99 TOS Pack and one of the recommended TOS emulators for Windows (see our price list). If you still do not have a TOS emulator for Apple computers, please order MagiCMac and NVDI, too.

IMPORTANT: If you want to get both the SL99 Windows Pack and the SL99 TOS/Mac Pack, we have to add 30 DM to your invoice. Please keep in mind that we only ship on HD floppies.

What about old modules, drivers and fonts?

All modules and drivers which are a part of the Calamus SL standard package will be shipped with the actual version. All additional modules and drivers from MGI (DMC), adequate systems, FRS and inverse that are registered here for your Calamus version will be added to actual versions if necessary. Your old CFN fonts can still be used.

If you own additional modules for a Windows Calamus, we will add the SL equivalents, where possible. Example: You bought Bridge v2.0 for Calamus NT 1.0, you will receive Bridge 2.0 for SL with your SL99 upgrade. We will

offer an upgrade to Bridge 3.1 with enhanced functions with the shipment.

Translated from German original mailing by Ulf Dunkel, reviewed by Fred Bruch.

[Editor's note: for prices and other details, set your web browser to: http://calamus.net/us/calamus/index.html]

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. This week's column is going to be on the short side, but before we get to the meat of this week's column, I'd just like to say a few words about the controversy over Elia Kazan receiving an Oscar last week.

Yes, it is true that he caved in to the pressure brought to bear by The Committee on Un-American Activities, or whatever it was called back in the fifties. Communist hunting was the order of the day and Tailgunner Joe was bound and determined to bag some bad guys to bolster his image (both his public image and his self image, I'd say).

The deal was that you'd get called a communist, whether or not it was true, and the only way you could possibly get yourself off the hook was to give The Committee the names of other communists (again, whether or not it was true). Of course you could try to fight it, but fighting The Committee was the same as fighting the government. And fighting the government was definitely un-American, so you'd be no better off than if you just caved in.

To us, forty years later, what Kazan did seems to have been an act of cowardice. But if you were under suspicion and didn't roll on someone else, you could forget about working in any meaningful capacity. Many in Hollywood recovered from The Committee's dirty work only after decades, and many never recovered at all. In Kazan's place, I honestly cannot say what I would have done.

Perhaps we should instead expend our time and energy placing the blame where it so clearly belongs: Squarely upon the shoulders of those who would seek power and prestige by denouncing, demeaning, and degrading others. While the event I've mentioned here happened forty years ago, it echoes still from one coast to the other and beyond as new 'Tailgunners' arise to take the places of the old. They're still with us folks, they've just changed their platform and battle cry. Or perhaps they've just become more patient, realizing that people usually take the path of least resistance, and that time is on their side. At any rate, we're not out of the woods yet.

I'm sure that at least some of you have opinions on this subject too, so

feel free to drop me a line to tell me what you think... for publication or not. Your choice.

Well, enough of my rambling. Let's get on with the reason for this column: All the news, hints, tips, and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

John Whatty asks:

"Can you help with a few questions ?

What ST BBS software is available ? What ST BBS software is still supported ? Is there any ST BBS software that can be accessed by Telnet?

Some software that I've used/heard of .... ST Keep MiniBBS RatSoft Octopus Forem BBS Express Michtron - remember the rash of BBS's that appeared after ST Format put it on their cover disk??"

Callym Lerwick tells John:

"Man, I still got a copy of the latest known Fnordadel from five years ago laying around somewhere that still ain't found its way onto the net... Whatever happened to Fnordadel? :)

If ya can run Linux/68k, check out Citadel/UX at http://uncnsrd.mt-kisco.ny.us/

Does MiNT do posix threads?"

My friend Rob Mahlert adds:

"Here are 2 pages you might want to check out..

http://www.tgm-bbs.demon.co.uk/quickbbs.htm"

Stephen Burnett asks:

"Can anyone tell me how I can load TOS images on a real ST. I've tried making it into a system disk and things like that."

Pera Putnik tells Stephen to:

"Look at: http://members.tripod.com/~piters/atari/tosload.htm ."

'The Clockmeister' posts:

"I saw an Atari XE65 in a shop today, never having seen one before. This is probably the wrong newsgroup, but it does look like a miniature Atari ST.

What is it exactly?, what is is capable of, and is it rare ? The computer in question looked in a new condition and had an external PSU with it but nothing else.

I assume it's an 8 bit Atari, with 64K RAM but more info would be appreciated."

Brian van TIlborg answers:

"Its an 8 Bit computer. Check out the 8 bit NewsGroup (if its still active). Kind of neat. Like a C64 since you are a platform independent guy. <smile>"

Paul Nurminen posts:

"I've been waiting to get a NEMESIS board for my Falcon since last August from the North American distributor (Alex at ATY Computer). He's at the mercy of Titan, who've been giving him the run around all this time. Well, I finally got Titan to answer an e-mail about it, and here's what they told me:

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>Because of insufficient order quantities we are unable to produce new
>stocks of Nemesis. We are now concentrating on Tempest which will
>feature a minimum of 100MHz PowerPC processor. The PPC comes in a range
>of speeds up to 240MHz.
>
>Apologies if this inconvenienced you.

Not good. Not good at all. <frown>"

Doctor Clu replies:

"In the message below, Paul wrote about not getting a NEMESIS board for his Falcon. Now, for this, let me first say how sorry I am to hear that.

But to a 100-240 MHZ Atari clone, let me say...

HELL YEAH!

NOW WE'RE TALKING!! Now that's real ATARI POWER!!

So what's the progress report so far. If this goes through, this might be a Atari worth shooting for!

So questions... Are they working on a 68K emulator for their new PPC machine? Being a motorola based machine like the Macintosh, they will encounter many similar pitfalls. Would a Atari PPC at 100 MHZ emulating a 68K Atari be much better than a 68030 Atari TT? I doubt it.

Of course, I'm sure in time, the programs would be PPC native and this wouldn't be an issue. I would, of course, get an Atari PPC that would run the old games and applications at normal speed, and of course I could enjoy the blinding speed of the PPC with (like a modified version of CAB for good internet browsing, printing, etc)

I'm sure at those speeds, emulation of other platforms will come a lot easier.

This is truly exciting! If the PPC is becoming a reality for the Atari platform, what challenges await us Atari users? And what will be possible with this new processor?"

Mike Grove tells Paul and Doctor Clu:

"I'm no programmer, but I have read that 68K code must be run throught

sort of a cross compiler to run on the Cold Fire CPU's (this info at the Motorola site). What does this mean for the "Tempest", a code interceptor? I wouldn't even want to get into the PPC part."

James F. Haslam asks:

"Can anyone tell me if Telstar is still supported? Its written by Peter Rottengator (sorry if I've spelt that wrong! :))

I've tried most of the (STiK/StiNG support) Telnet clients, but this is by far the most usable. I'm mainly using it to play MUDs (Multi User Dungeons), but it could do with some extra features, such as an address book, and scrollbars."

Brian Roland tells James:

"I've emailed Peter about Telstar in recent months... He does still support it, and possibly will work on it some in the future, but he's also very very busy with work, life, and STing itself. Telstar didn't 'seem' to be highest on his list of things to do, and can't say that I blame him."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what the are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - "Tarzan"!! "Medal of Honor"!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" JagFest '99! "GEX 3"!
"Bloody Roar II"! Bleem!
"Need for Speed" Sequel!
"Resident Evil 2" And much more!

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Electronic Arts to Release DreamWorks Interactive's Medal of Honor, the First World War II-inspired Game for the PlayStation

Electronic Arts(TM), the world's largest interactive entertainment software company, announces the development of Medal of Honor, a WWII-themed first-person action adventure title from DreamWorks Interactive.

Inspired by DreamWorks SKG co-founder Steven Spielberg, Medal of Honor marks the first WWII action adventure game developed for the PlayStation console system. The game allows players to take on the role of an agent in

the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the United States' wartime spy and covert operations agency, who aids the Allied Forces in an effort to thwart the German take over of Europe.

''As soon as Steven proposed the concept for Medal of Honor in the spring of 1997, we knew we could develop a remarkable game around the idea," says Glenn Entis head of DreamWorks Interactive. ''The reaction within DreamWorks Interactive to developing the title was overwhelming, the game is a natural for us."

Medal of Honor begins on June 5, 1944, the night before D-day when the Alliance launched a massive aerial assault behind German lines. Assuming the role of a young C-47 pilot shot down during the operation, the player is recruited into the OSS and begins a new career as a field agent, participating in various covert operations, search and rescue assignments, and commando raids. Each mission is drawn from pivotal historical events that helped shape the Allied crusade in Europe, including sorties involving the development, capture, and destruction of secret war-making technologies.

''With the surging popularity of WWII-based projects across all entertainment forms," says Frank Gibeau, Vice President of Marketing at Electronic Arts, ''we are excited to be the company that brings the WWII experience to video gamers."

To ensure Medal of Honor adequately reflects the realism and accuracy of the World War II era, DreamWorks Interactive brought in Capt. Dale Dye, USMC (retired), the top military consultant to the entertainment industry. Renowned for his contribution to such films as ''Saving Private Ryan," ''Platoon," ''Born on the Fourth of July" and ''Mission Impossible," Dye worked closely with Medal of Honor's production team to define characters, develop missions, and model accurate 3D versions of over fifteen different weapons from the era.

Notes Medal of Honor producer Peter Hirschmann, ''Our goal when we started this project almost a year and a half ago was to design and build, from the ground up, the most fun and accessible first person shooter for the PlayStation that we could-- starting with the controller and moving up from there. Working with Captain Dye has been an invaluable experience for the team, because he's helped us develop compelling gameplay and a historically accurate story line that gives players themselves the opportunity to rise above and beyond the call of duty. He's been instrumental in giving Medal of Honor an authentic feel."

Gameplay features that will help Medal of Honor deliver an overall enjoyable gaming experience include:

-- More than ten missions in which the player must accomplish specific objectives and goals in order to succeed and advance. Additionally, players will be able to earn special assignment bonus missions for excelling in duty.

-- Fifteen authentic World War II era weapons for the player to utilize. These include Thompson Sub-Machine gun, Springfield Sniper Rifle and the OSS Assassination Crossbow.

-- Thirty levels of a fully realized 3-D world, including a secret V2 Rocket Plant, a deadly U-boat submarine, and a fortified Bavarian Castle that has been turned into a POW Camp.

-- Twenty different Artificial Intelligence enemy types, from the Wehrmacht Light Infantry to the Elite Heavy Shock Troops.

-- Special disguise mode that allows players to put on an enemy uniform and move unnoticed through German encampments. (Forget to salute the right person, though, and you're history.)

-- Distinctive sounds effects, voice and radio communications to help fully draw the player into the historic wartime atmosphere.

-- Highly destructible environments that illustrate the ravages of war.

-- Multiple two player modes, including head-to-head, co-operative, and a wild version of "Hot Potato" using a live hand grenade.

-- Original music soundtrack featuring an evocative orchestral score by award-winning composer Michael Giacchino.

-- Actual WWII film footage to help immerse the player in the era.

Eidos Interactive Launches Major National Marketing Campaign for GEX 3: Deep Cover Gecko

GEX, the fast-talking gecko king of the PlayStation, will return to store shelves by March 27 in GEX 3: Deep Cover Gecko.

To support the launch, electronic game giant Eidos Interactive is pulling out the stops with a major marketing campaign including a multi-million dollar television and print advertising push.

GEX, a smart aleck who combines a Bart Simpson attitude with a vocabulary of witty pop cultural illusions, is fast becoming one of the most visible electronic game characters. Eidos is spreading the word that GEX is back in town in a spy-twinged adventure. GEX 3: Deep Cover Gecko, the third installment of the game, features full-motion video footage of Baywatch actress Marliece Andrada who portrays Agent Xtra, a sultry spy who's kidnapped. As always, comedian Dana Gould provides the voice of GEX.

The campaign has kicked into gear with a GEX and Life Savers candy promotion taking place now. Visitors to the candystand.com website can win a trip to a Six Flags amusement park. Additional prizes include PlayStation or Nintendo 64 game machines and copies of the upcoming GEX 3. The promotion is expected to generate two million consumer impressions.

In addition, Eidos will run live-action television spots featuring the voice of Dana Gould on national outlets including MTV, Comedy Central, ESPN, ESPN2, TBS and WWF wrestling bouts on USA Network. The six-week push is expected to deliver more than 140,000,000 impressions.

Prominent print advertising will run in electronic gaming and pop culture publications including GamePro and SPIN magazines. The game will also be advertised in DC and Wildstorm comic books. Eidos is feeding the retail chain with point-of-purchase (POPs) programs, specialized pre-order campaigns and colorful GEX standees. EHigh profile retail pre-order programs incorporating demo discs, pin up calendars and action figure giveaways are planned.

‘‘GEX 3 brings new life to the PSX action game category by combining humorous live action video sequences with unique moves and game mechanics," said Scott Steinberg, senior vice president of marketing, Eidos Interactive. ‘‘We are pursuing an integrated marketing campaign that captures the irreverent spirit of GEX, who is emerging as an elite videogame character."

GEX advertising has a witty tone that complements the satiric elements of the new game which is a parody within a parody, riffing on the spy comedy of the Austin Powers film series, as well as famed secret agents like James Bond.

‘‘GEX’s humor turns pop culture allusions and icons upside down and our marketing approach mirrors his personality," said Steinberg. For example, some print ads will feature a topless Andrada with the mischievous GEX using his hands to cover her chest -- a visual nod to a Janet Jackson image on a famed Rolling Stone magazine cover.

Electronic Arts Announces the Release of Need for Speed: High Stakes

Electronic Arts, the world’s largest interactive entertainment software company, announces the highly anticipated release of Need For Speed: High Stakes for the PlayStation.

This latest addition to the popular Need For Speed series delivers a completely new high speed, action-packed racing experience through an array of fresh and unique gameplay features. The game offers a "High Stakes" mode that raises the stakes and consequences of true competition to a new level; delivers visible and punitive car damage; includes a completely revamped "Hot Pursuit" mode; a broad range of licensed sports and supercars; a total of ten new tracks including seven open road tracks and three purpose-built circuits; a game economy that allows for car purchases, upgrades and modification; and stunning special effects and graphics.

"Titles bearing the Need For Speed emblem have always delivered innovative, top of the line racing fun," says Hanno Lemke, senior producer of the Need For Speed series. "Need For Speed: High Stakes not only carries on that tradition, but it also sets a new standard of competition within the racing category by delivering exciting new game elements that model the real life risks and consequences of fierce racing competition in painstaking detail."

Need For Speed: High Stakes introduces players to a completely new way of video game racing. As indicated by its name, the game challenges players to put more at stake than ever before as they test their racing skills against their friends or computer opponents with new smarter and tougher artificial intelligence. The "High Stakes" mode pits racers in intense head-to-head duels where they must bet one of their highly prized cars against one another. Helping to build the emotion and intensity, each of the cars wagered are ones that player(s) have spent countless hours earning and customizing in previous races. At the end, the winner takes possession of the loser’s car via the memory card.

Hard core racing fans will also appreciate the new "Tournament and Special Events" mode that features an economic system in which racers earns

virtual "money" by competing in 14 unique tournaments and special events. They can use their winnings from these events to purchase new exotics, repair-damaged cars, or upgrade and modify supercars into their dream cars.

Additionally, Need For Speed: High Stakes offers a revamped "Hot Pursuit" mode with new and improved features including the ability to be the police -- or conversely, be the object of the police chases. Players in "Hot Pursuit" mode are provided with ongoing real-time cop chatter from police radios to alert them of the status of the chase and are given the option of choosing to race from an assortment of performance cars or pursuit vehicles. When playing as a police car, player's can call for back-up, radio ahead for roadblocks and even request that tire spikes be laid across the road.

A total of 15 licensed sports and supercars are featured in Need For Speed: High Stakes, which through the purchase of various performance enhancing packages creates over 40 unique vehicles models, each with its own distinct driving character modeled through a new and more realistic four-point physics system. Each car is also supported by a 3D car showroom presentation, including the respective performance specifications and statistics of their real life counterparts, such as weight, torque, horsepower, top speed, acceleration and braking performance, engine type, handling characteristics and manufacturer development history. Featured cars include:

-- Porsche 911 Turbo (includes a version in police trim)
-- Lamborghini Diablo SV (includes a version in police trim)
-- Corvette C5 (includes a version in police trim)
-- BMW M5 (includes a version in police trim)
-- Chevrolet Caprice (available as a pursuit vehicle only)
-- BMW Z3
-- Ferrari 550 Maranello
-- Ferrari F5
-- Pontiac Firebird
-- Chevrolet Camaro Z28
-- Mercedes CLK GTR
-- Mercedes SLK230
-- McLaren F1 GTR
-- Jaguar XKR
-- Aston Martin DB7

Need For Speed: High Stakes boasts detailed graphics and special effects that deliver a highly realistic racing experience with attention paid to every detail. Such touches include modeled car interiors with visible animated drivers in both player and opponent cars, visible and punitive car damage that will affect driving performance, reverse lights, turn signals, hazard lights, customizable license plates, varying weather conditions, oncoming traffic and day/night time driving with fully functional headlights.

Two-player split screen and Dual Shock Analog support is included. The game carries an "E" Everyone ESRB rating and MSRP of US$49.95. Need For Speed: High Stakes for the PlayStation was developed by Electronic Arts Canada and is being published worldwide by Electronic Arts.

Capcom Presents Enhanced Mega-Hit, Resident Evil 2 to Nintendo 64

Capcom, a leading worldwide publisher and developer of award-winning video games, today announced its blockbuster hit, Resident Evil 2, will be launched this fall for the Nintendo 64 game console.

One of Capcom’s biggest franchises and one of the best-selling PlayStation titles of all time, Resident Evil 2 has sold more than 4.5 million units worldwide. The Nintendo 64 version will include a number of enhancements including improved game graphics, no load times, lightning-quick game play, high-resolution game play and hidden costumes.

Exclusive to the Nintendo 64 version is a customized feature that allows players to adjust the intensity of the game. Now players can change the color of enemies’ blood and adjust the level graphic content. Resident Evil 2 is rated ‘‘M" for mature audiences.

In Resident Evil 2, Raccoon City continues to endure an onslaught of horror and fear as a mysterious, flesh-eating virus spreads into town that turns everyone it infects into zombies. In previous versions of Resident Evil 2, players found clues in books and files to help them complete the game.

Nintendo 64 players can access dozens of items and game information from stories published on the entire Resident Evil series, and save in the scrapbook to view at any time. Another N64 exclusive feature is after the game is played once, items will be relocated randomly, adding additional replay value. The N64 version is both analog controller and ’Rumble Pack’ compatible, making the intense action come alive.

‘‘Resident Evil 2 is one of many Capcom products that Nintendo 64 customers have asked for ever since the system was released," said Robert Lindsey, senior vice president sales and marketing, Capcom Entertainment. ‘‘We have added many enhancements to the Nintendo 64 version to take advantage of its capabilities. We are thrilled to deliver one of this year’s biggest N64 games. Nintendo owners get ready for the fright of your life."

Resident Evil 2 begins with a stunning introduction sequence, setting up the story and introducing players to Leon Kennedy, a Raccoon City rookie policeman, and Claire Redfield, a tough heroine in search of her brother. A mysterious virus has invaded Raccoon City and everyone it infects turns into zombies. Players control either Leon or Claire as they explore the entire Raccoon City locale with its huge 3D environments, and swarms of terrifying creatures of the undead.

Resident Evil 2 features a computer rendered graphic introduction and ending sequences using state-of-the-art motion capture technology that cost more than $1 million to create. Resident Evil 2 includes greater detailed graphics, heightened interaction with the game environment, mutant beasts, an arsenal of new weapons and more mind boggling puzzles and tricks. Hidden mini-games, known as Tofu and 4th Survivor, can be accessed if the player completes both adventures and meets specific requirements.

Resident Evil 2 introduces an entirely new cast of characters, character damage effects, and a ‘‘Zap" system whereby intricate sub-plots weave together to create multiple game play scenarios. Players complete the game once, play it again as the other character and ultimately experience a different game from the first. Now as never before, decisions from the first game affect the second game.

Adding to the intense realism of Resident Evil 2 is the way injuries affect the character’s performance. Players will see their character limp, stumble

and cringe from wounds and injuries. As your character takes on more and more damage it becomes increasingly more difficult to escape hungry zombies. With Resident Evil 2, players are drawn into a story where they are literally fighting for their lives.

Tarzan Swings Into Action on Game Boy Color System This Summer

The king of the jungle is ready to swing into action this summer when Activision, Inc., in collaboration with Disney Interactive, Inc., releases Tarzan(TM) for the Nintendo Game Boy Color system. The action-adventure game will be based on Walt Disney Pictures' highly anticipated animated feature film and is slated to launch simultaneously with the movie this summer.

''Tarzan(TM) has been treasured by generations throughout the world, and we are very excited to introduce the legendary king of the apes to one of the largest game platforms," said Mitch Lasky, senior vice president, Activision Studios. ''With its extensive history, compelling characters and intriguing story-line, Tarzan(TM) will appeal to a wide range of game players."

Tarzan(TM) for the Game Boy Color lets players control a variety of characters as they master the art of vine swinging and tree surfing in an action-packed expedition to save a family of apes from the hands of evil hunters. Players must thrash their way through 15 levels set in the heart of the African jungle battling deadly snakes, killer crocodiles and stampeding elephants to protect the family of apes from devious hunters.

Bringing an exciting mix of magic and challenge to the classic story, Tarzan(TM) immerses players in a richly detailed world filled with environmental hazards and deadly enemies. Players must use timing and cunning as they run, jump, swim, swing and dodge dangerous obstacles and menacing foes. Featuring vivid colors and fluid character movements, Tarzan(TM) sets new standards for animation and gameplay. Packed with fun and bravery, Tarzan's(TM) jungle adventure comes alive in the palm of players' hands as they control the ape-man through his evolution from boyhood to manhood and follow his destiny as he becomes king of the apes.

Fasten Your Seatbelts and Hang on to Your Hats!

Just in time for the spring season, a new amusement park is ready to open - your own! Hasbro Interactive introduces RollerCoaster Tycoon by MicroProse, where players design, build and manage the roller coasters and amusement parks of their dreams.

RollerCoaster Tycoon incorporates hundreds of coaster-building play possibilities, real-life scenery elements and other non-roller coaster rides and attractions as it challenges players to build a working theme park that satisfies the demanding virtual public. There are no height requirements but you must balance excitement and profits to be a true RollerCoaster Tycoon!

"Roller Coaster Tycoon brings fantasy, creativity and strategy together into one of the most entertaining and exciting games of the year," said

Tom Dusenberry, President of Hasbro Interactive.

Roller Coaster Tycoon for the Windows 95/98 platform is currently available in stores for the suggested retail price of $29.95.

PlayStation Sequel: Bloody Roar II

Bloody Roar II, the fiercely awaited sequel to 1998's beastly 3D anime hit Bloody Roar, will be available May 25 at retailers nationwide, Sony Computer Entertainment America announced.

Available exclusively for the PlayStation(R) game console, Bloody Roar II sets itself apart from traditional fighting games by allowing players to morph from human warriors into lethal predators.

"In the videogame industry, where the fighting game genre makes up about 20 percent of overall software sales, Bloody Roar II distinguishes itself by featuring unbelievably realistic animation quality that will please even the most avid fighting game enthusiasts," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America.

Improvements from the first Bloody Roar include a new Custom Mode in which players can create their own combo moves, a higher resolution for improved graphic clarity, seven new fighters and four returning favorite characters that have been modified to be older and more engaging. Two of the 11 characters in the game are hidden.

If played with the Dual Shock Analog Controller, gameplayers will feel every pulverizing punch and return bone-cracking combinations with lightening control and response.

Bloody Roar II's fighting action evolves around a dark and intriguing plot unveiled in the game's Story Mode, during which each combatant's life and inner quest are revealed in more than 100 graphically devastating scenes.

The story begins as the millennium dawns and a new breed of assassins arises as the Beast Freedom Front. Players choose one of these characters, then fight their way through the story. As the human-beasts engage, background information about each character is revealed.

The warriors in Bloody Roar II are driven by private motivations of rage, vengeance, love or power. Each character conceals the ferocity of a wild beast, so when these motivations are triggered, and build up during combat, the fighters morph into lethal predators, such as ravenous wolves, monstrous insects, and never-before-seen bestial forms, each with its own unique fighting style.

In the Custom Mode gamers can tailor gameplay elements, altering the look of the fighter by increasing the size of the character's head and arms. Fighters can also side-step to counter oncoming attacks.

Electronic Arts Announces The Shipment Of Beetle Adventure Racing For The Nintendo 64

Revolutionary New Title Featuring The Award-Winning New Beetle Offers

The Best Of All Worlds In First Ever Adventure Racing Game

Electronic Arts(TM), the world’s largest interactive entertainment software company, announces the shipping of Beetler Adventure Racing, a revolutionary new interactive entertainment racing game developed exclusively for the Nintendo 64 system. Electronic Arts (EA) licensed the rights to feature Volkswagen’s award-winning New Beetle in the game, which combines key gameplay features from the most popular interactive gaming genres.

‘‘Beetle Adventure Racing takes an innovative approach to how players engage in gaming by fusing the fun and explorative nature of the adventure genre with the intense and competitive excitement of the racing category," says Hanno Lemke, Senior Producer at EA. ‘‘Complementing the game’s fun and over the top action is the highly appealing and distinctive New Beetle, a car which is fun and hip, recognized and loved the world over for its endearing personality and character, and which appeals to adults and kids alike."

Unlike any other title currently available, Beetle Adventure Racing creates a new game category by combining cross category features, such as an array of action-packed adventure excursions with high-adrenaline racing elements. Game players race in the New Beetle while interacting not only with other opponents, but the environment as well, in the form of multiple routes, hidden areas and surprise short cuts. Adding to the breadth of the title is the ability to find and acquire power-ups such as ‘‘nitro" boxes for a short blast of speed, or bonus points cleverly placed about the tracks which, when found in the game’s Championship Mode, awards the player with additional bonus items and game cheats.

Beetle Adventure Racing features extremely crisp graphics and special effects, nitro-bursts for added car performance, intuitive car handling and control, customized cars and expansive 3-D areas to race on and explore. Each of the track environments has been designed so that players can drive and explore almost anywhere, including additional locales accessible only when players veer off the beaten paths.

Another key feature of the title is the multi-player Beetle Battle mode in which up to four players can engage in competitive racing events inside nine unique battle arenas. Competition is quick, fun and intense as players strive to keep their Beetles’ power meters full (depleted power meters cause cars to explode), while finding and collecting a series of colored lady bug icons. Once all the lady bug icons are obtained, racers have to find and cross the finish line while fending off opponents who are able to steal lady bugs from the other players and cause havoc. For instance, players who acquire certain power-ups will be able to fire off special rockets that steal their opponents’ lady bugs, or even handicap their opponents by inverting their screens upside down forcing them to race upside down as though they were on the ceiling.

Enhancing the game’s uniqueness is the fun of driving the distinctly shaped, highly acclaimed New Beetle from Volkswagen. Motor Trend Magazine recently announced the selection of the New Beetle as the ’99 Import Car of the Year. In naming the winner, Motor Trend applauded the New Beetle’s artful styling, outstanding value, excellent safety designs, roomy interior, fine-tuned suspension and inviting, fun-to-drive nature.

High-Octane Driving Mayhem Crashes Onto the Nintendo 64 System With the Release of Activision’s Vigilante 8

Get ready to feel the power of rubber hitting the road and metal crushing metal when Activision, Inc. launches Vigilante 8 onto the Nintendo 64 system the week of March 22, 1999. Building on the runaway success of its PlayStation game console predecessor, the newest edition of Vigilante 8 brings all of the tread-chewing, ammo-spewing, high-octane vehicular warfare and more to the Nintendo 64. The title will be available in more than 10,000 retail outlets throughout the United States and Canada and will carry a suggested retail price of $59.95.

Vigilante 8 propels players into the most intense vehicular warfare as they battle across the American west and southwest in an epic showdown between good and evil. Choosing from 12 supercharged, tricked-out V8 vehicles, each of which is linked to a unique driver, gamers are challenged to destroy their opponents in a series of death-matches spanning 11 action-packed arenas.

‘‘Vigilante 8 is the must-have auto-combat title of the year," states Mitch Lasky, senior vice president of Activision Studios. ‘‘Combining off-road warfare and over-the-top vehicles and characters, Vigilante 8 for the N64 has all the kill-or-be-killed action of the original, plus added features, such as new multi-player combat options with up to four players.‘‘

Showcasing a lightning-fast 3D landscape engine, stunning graphics and special effects, Vigilante 8 promises to detonate and dominate as the only true auto-combat game on the Nintendo 64 platform. The Nintendo 64 version incorporates exclusive features, including a new arena, Super Dreamland 64, a colorful cartoon-like fantasy world complete with rainbows, magic mushrooms, knights, chickens and an ‘‘evil" castle. The arena provides unique strategic challenges, as well as new interactive level-specific features. Other new game highlights consist of an alien quest, multi-player action - three and four player modes, two-player co-op quests, plus all new brawl, smear and survival modes - and a high resolution mode with Expansion Pak support.

Developed by Luxoflux Corp., the game boasts an impressive 3D engine that produces intense combative gameplay, complex car physics and realistic terrain graphics - including lens flares and real-time reflection mapping. From a Colorado ski resort to the lights and action of Casino City, all of the 11 detailed arenas are completely destructible and include unique terrain-based gameplay elements. Players can utilize each of the arena’s specialized features to their advantage - such as causing an avalanche at the ski resort - and strategically damage and eliminate their enemies.

All of the fully-loaded ’70s style vehicles in Vigilante 8 feature a four-wheel independent suspension that affects the way each car handles and performs. Each vehicle is armed with its own outrageous special weapon, such as an arsenal of mutant killer bees which, when unleashed, will attack and drain the energy of any moving target. Additionally, hidden within the destructible environments and structures are valuable weapons and power-ups.

Bleem Emulator Makers Second To Defy Sony

Another software emulator that allows PC users to play video games designed for Sony's popular PlayStation console has hit the Internet. The latest PlayStation-like program was designed by Bleem and is being marketed under the same name.

The Bleem emulator joins Connectix Corp.'s Virtual Game Station as a low-cost product giving consumers access to hundreds of PlayStation video game titles from a computer's desktop.

Bleem may also eventually join Connectix as a target of legal action from Sony, which has come down hard against third-party Playstation emulators. Sony has declined to comment on if it is considering legal action against Bleem.

Sony was denied a temporary restraining order last month that would have prevented Connectix from selling its system. But the PlayStation maker has vowed to continue fighting emulation programs.

Unlike the Virtual Game Station, which gives Apple Computer Inc. users access to PlayStation games on newer G3 Power Macintosh computers, the Bleem offers the same ability to the widespread audience of PC users. Bleem claims its product will work with any 166 megahertz (MHz) or faster Pentium-based system.

Bleem officials say on the company's Web site that they fear a lawsuit from Sony, but feel within their rights in marketing their emulator.

One defense Bleem is using is that the PlayStation is at the end of its product run, and therefore its product won't steal any potential sales from Sony.

For its part, Sony is planning to release PlayStation II next year, but is eager to point out that the new console will play games designed for the original PlayStation.

Bleem is offering a beta demonstration of its emulator at its Web site, as is encouraging interested parties to let Sony know that they want emulators on the market. Bleem is also hoping to build a defense for its technology by encouraging visitors to its site to let independent game makers know that emulators may drive future sales of older titles.

The main appeal of emulators is their relatively low cost. While a new Sony PlayStation markets for about $120, a Bleem will only set you back by $39.95. The company is expecting to begin shipping its product by April 10.

Connectix began shipping its $49 Game Station in mid-January through its Web site, and the product is also available at some Macintosh software and peripherals retailers. The gaming system allows Mac users to play about one-third of the 300 titles available for PlayStation.

Sony's console is one of the most widespread game systems in the world. The company estimates some 30 million of the machines have been sold to date.

Connectix officials, meantime, continue to defend their company's right to compete with Sony for the huge market of people who buy video games made by independent developers.

Connectix spokesmen report that demand for the Game Station has been

strong with the company fighting to keep up with a backlog of orders. The system was introduced to the public at the Macworld Expo in San Francisco during January and Connectix claims that it was able to sell over 3,000 units of the product over the course of the week-long conference. The Game Station works with Apple’s G3 Macintosh computers, including desktops, PowerBooks and iMacs.

Bleem’s Web site is located at http://www.bleem.com
Connectix Corp.’s Web site is http://www.connectix.com
Sony’s Web address is http://www.sony.com

Midway First to Feature Pack-Ins With Upcoming Games for Nintendo 64, PC and PlayStation Game Console

Midway Home Entertainment Inc., a leading video game developer, announced Thursday that it will be the first company to include toys packed in with Nintendo 64 games.

Midway will feature MicroMachines toy cars in retail packages of MicroMachines 64 Turbo for the Nintendo 64 and MicroMachines V3 for PC at all retail locations. Rampage 2: Universal Tour will feature a Rampage character soft key chain or T-shirt inside packages of Rampage 2: Universal Tour for Nintendo 64 and shrink-wrapped with the Playstation game console version at selected retail outlets. MicroMachines 64 Turbo and MicroMachines V3 for PC are expected to ship to retail on March 23, and Rampage 2: Universal Tour on March 30.

‘‘Midway is always seeking innovative promotions and marketing tools to help expand the reach of its titles," said Paula Cook, director of marketing at Midway Home Entertainment. ‘‘These collectible giveaways are a perfect accompaniment to the games, extending the gameplay from the game screen into the living room and are ideally suited for the young audiences we’re targeting for these two titles."

The Rampage 2: Universal Tour keychains, in one of three characters: Curtis, Ralph or George, will be available with the purchase of the Nintendo 64 version at Wal-Mart while supplies last. K-Mart stores will have 6‘‘ plush Rampage characters: Ruby, Lizzie and Boris for gift with purchase on both platforms. EB and Best Buy will have a T-shirt gift for customers who pre-buy Rampage 2: Universal Tour, while Target, Sears and Toys R’ Us retail outlets will feature a T-shirt shrink-wrapped with the game. Babbage’s customers will receive a Rampage notepad with purchase. In addition to the pack-in promotions, Midway is supporting both Rampage 2: Universal Tour and MicroMachines 64 Turbo with full marketing campaigns, including print advertising in consumer, children’s, sports and gaming publications, point-of-sale materials and an aggressive public relations campaign. Midway will also be running television spots for Rampage 2: Universal Tour.

In Rampage 2: Universal Tour, George, Lizzy, and Ralph, the lovable ‘‘monsters of mayhem" from Rampage: World Tour all have been captured, and it’s up to three new mutants, a lobster, a rat and a rhino, to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting universe and rescue their three predecessors. Up to three gamers can take control of these mutants and play in cooperative mode, cruising through the universe and into outer space, guiding them on their destructive rescue mission. Players will encounter several plot twists and be able to unlock a hidden character along the way.

MicroMachines 64 Turbo for the Nintendo 64 and MicroMachines V3 for PC feature multiplayer races for up to eight players simultaneously. Racing in tanks, ice cream trucks, racing cars and swamp boats, players will be able to compete on wild tracks including a breakfast table, a pool table or even in a science lab. Machines will also include a driving school, a head to head race vs. the computer, a challenge race, a time trial challenge race and a time trial single race.

Next-Gen Consoles Vie for Spotlight

Days after Sony announced plans to ship a next-generation console in 2000, Sega reaffirmed its commitment to releasing its Dreamcast game system in the United States this year.

Bernie Stollar, president and chief operating officer of Sega, told reporters this month that his company is "100 percent on track" to deliver the next-generation system by fall.

Stollar said that two key national retailers, Babbage’s Etc. and Electronics Boutique, have started accepting customer deposits of $10 to $25 to reserve units of Dreamcast.

Babbage’s has taken 7,000 pre-orders nationwide, and Electronics Boutique has reserved 4,000 units, he said. Stollar noted that customers in these stores are placing orders without knowing Dreamcast’s street price or its launch date.

Sega officials said Dreamcast contains a 128-bit RISC processor and independent 3-D and 64-channel audio processing. The console also features proprietary compression technology that will allow game developers to fit more than the standard 640MB of data on a CD-ROM.

Dreamcast also comes with a dual analog/digital controller and the Visual Memory System, a memory card with a small LCD screen. The VMS unit doubles as a portable game system.

The console will run Microsoft’s Windows CE as well as a proprietary Sega operating system. Online game-playing capabilities will be a key feature of Dreamcast.

Competitor Sony’s next-generation system, PlayStation 2, also uses a 128-bit processor. The CPU, developed by Toshiba and SCE, combines an embedded Sony graphics chip called the Graphic Synthesizer, an I/O processor co-developed with LSI Logic and an SPU2 sound synthesizer (a second-generation version of the sound synthesizer used in the current PlayStation).

PlayStation 2 also supports DVD and traditional CD-ROM media.

Stollar said that Sega isn’t immediately concerned about competition from PlayStation 2, because the Sony system won’t be released in the United States until next fall, and Sony must manufacture the device and develop software.

"On paper, it sounds impressive, but the fact is it is still on paper," Stollar said.

Sony declined to comment.

Sega promises eight to 12 games will be available at Dreamcast's launch, and 30 titles will hit the market in time for the holiday selling season.

Sega has 3,000 developers dedicated to creating Dreamcast games, Stollar said. Retailers, meanwhile, said they are awaiting Dreamcast's arrival.

A sales manager for Electronics Boutique in Southern California said customers are showing early enthusiasm for the product.

"Dreamcast is shaping up to be great," said the sales manager. "And they have a lot of software support behind them."

EB store personnel expressed hope that they'll receive a preview unit to demonstrate Dreamcast for customers, the sales manager said. He also said he expects Sega will launch the console in early September, or at an earlier date if enough software is ready to ship to stores.

Stollar said Sega will begin advertising the system in April.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Songbird Productions Formed to Sustain Atari Consoles

From: Carl Forhan <forhan@millcomm.com>

March 19, 1999
For Immediate Release:

ROCHESTER, MN - Carl Forhan, well-known hobby developer for Atari consoles, is pleased to announce the formation of Songbird Productions to sustain Atari consoles into the new millennium.

The emphasis of Songbird Productions will be to both publish games Carl has personally developed as well as become a resource for other hobby developers looking to publish a game for any Atari console, from the 2600 to the Jaguar.

"I've been doing hobby development on the Lynx and Jaguar for a long time," stated Carl. "Now I'm at the stage where it makes sense to form Songbird Productions. Atari fans everywhere will be pleased with the level of support I plan to provide for Atari consoles over the next year to two years. I have a couple of surprises up my sleeve that will be revealed in the coming months."

Current projects at Songbird Productions include SFX and Ponx for the

Lynx, and Protector for the Jaguar. Several specific, new projects are also being evaluated at this time.

To keep up to date with the latest news at Songbird Productions, be sure to visit the company web site at http://songbird.atari.org, or send an email to songbird@atari.org.

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JagFest ’99 Details Now Available

From: Carl Forhan <forhan@millcomm.com>

March 19, 1999
For immediate release:

ROCHESTER, MN -- Songbird Productions is proud to be the official sponsor of this year’s JagFest. This third annual event will be held in Rochester, MN, on June 18, 1999. The theme for this year’s event is "Celebrate Atari", and Songbird Productions welcomes the opportunity to expand the event to cover all Atari consoles -- from the classic VCS (2600) to the Lynx to the Jaguar.

Enthusiasts are encouraged to bring their own collections for display or trade. Special accommodations must be made with Songbird Productions for those wishing to reserve a table, TV, or sell any merchandise.

Details are as follows:

Where: Holiday Inn South
1630 South Broadway
Rochester, MN 55904
(507)288-1844
When: June 18, 1999
Set up from 7-10am
General public from 10am-10pm
Cost: Adult: $10 in advance, $12 at the door
Ages 6-12: $3
Ages 5 & under: FREE

Hotel information

The Holiday Inn South has a limited selection of rooms available at a special JagFest price of $79 per night. You must call the hotel directly at (507)288-1844 to receive this special pricing, and notify the representative of the discount code ’JAG’. These rooms must be reserved before May 27, 1999, to guarantee availability.

Other hotels are also available within walking distance of the Holiday Inn South. These hotels include:

Quality Inn and Suites
1620 1st Ave SE
Rochester, MN 55904
(507)282-8091

Comfort Inn
1625 S. Broadway
Rochester, MN 55904
(507)281-2211

Econo Lodge South
1850 S. Broadway
Rochester, MN 55904
(507)282-9905

Tickets

Tickets may now be reserved directly with Songbird Productions. Send an email to songbird@atari.org for details.

Tickets or wristbands will be issued, allowing attendees to come and go all day long as needed. All children 12 & under must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

General Information

Be sure to visit the JagFest ’99 web site for the latest information:

http://jagfest.atari.org

For those who may wish to remain in Rochester over the weekend, more activities are currently slated:

Saturday, June 19 - Take a trip to one of the largest shopping centers in the world: the Mall of America. Try your hand at the NASCAR networked racing simulator, visit the arcade, play a round of laser tag at Starbase Omega, shop at the Starlog retail store or Electronics Boutique, or even try a roller coaster at Camp Snoopy. Plus, don’t forget to visit specialty video game stores Games to Go and Raven Video Games. Directions will be provided.

Sunday, June 20 - Before you head back home, join Carl Forhan for church at New Life Worship Center (http://www.newlifewc.org). NLWC is a contemporary Christian church dedicated to the singular purpose of bringing glory to the Lord and spreading the good news of the gospel. Carl energetically leads the music team with his vocals and keyboard skills. Other instruments include bass guitar, drums, piano, and back up vocals. This is one church service you won’t want to miss! Directions will be provided.

Other areas of interest in Rochester include the Mayo Clinic, IBM, Apache Mall (with arcade), Skyline Raceway and Waterslide, Cyber Cue pool hall, and more.

To keep up to date with the latest news at Songbird Productions, be sure to visit the company web site at http://songbird.atari.org, or send an email to songbird@atari.org.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft, U.S. Ready To Discuss Settlement

A Microsoft source said Monday that the firm is ready to make a good-faith effort to settle a long-running antitrust case, and a top Justice Department official said soon afterward that the government is ‘‘open to settlement."

But both sides set conditions that may make it difficult to turn that willingness into a deal to settle the bruising court case, in which the U.S. alleges that Microsoft Corp. abused monopoly power in the market for the Windows personal computer operating systems.

A Microsoft source said the company was making the effort in response to a suggestion made by the judge in the case before adjourning the trial for a recess in February. It will not resume until on or after April 12.

‘‘We have signaled the Justice Department that we are taking the judge’s direction to both parties very seriously," the Microsoft source said. ‘‘We’re going to make a good-faith effort to try to resolve these issues without the need for extended additional litigation." But the source said no date had been set.

Justice Department antitrust division chief Joel Klein who is attending a high-technology conference in Scottsdale, Ariz., said that the government was open to negotiations.

‘‘We have not received any settlement proposal from Microsoft," Klein said, adding that the department was ‘‘open to a settlement" that met all of the government’s requirements.

‘‘The department has always been and remains open to a settlement that fully protects consumers and assures that similar antitrust violations do not occur in the future," Klein told Reuters after speaking to the ‘‘PC Forum" conference.

A Microsoft source set limits on what Microsoft might find acceptable.

‘‘We cannot compromise our ability to innovate and add new features to our products," the source added.

One antitrust expert said the chances of settlement were "remote."

‘‘I’d say the chances are notably greater than zero but not probable either," said William Kovacic, a visiting professor of law at George Washington University Law School in Washington.

‘‘Both sides have good reasons to talk, but it remains hard to identify concessions that Microsoft can make that will satisfy the government’s expectations here," he said.

The Wall Street Journal touched off the latest flurry of excitement about

settlement negotiations with a report Monday that Microsoft was ready to talk. The Journal story was similar to one published recently by the Seattle Times, but there were no talks after the Seattle Times story. Then the Seattle Times editorialized a few days ago that Microsoft should try to settle the case.

But there are serious stumbling blocks to success.

First, settlement talks last spring left a bad taste among government negotiators. Shortly before the government and 19 states filed suit, the Redmond, Wash., firm asked for negotiations. The talks led nowhere, and those involved expressed skepticism about Microsoft's willingness to take the steps needed for a settlement in the future.

In addition, both sides seem confident about their performance in court so far. The trial began on Oct. 19, 1998 and adjourned last month after 62 trial days. It is set to hear rebuttal witnesses when it reconvenes next month.

Microsoft sources say they feel good about the trial record the company has built.

''We've built a very strong record," the Microsoft source said. ''But I think we do think that resolving this case for settlement would be better for everyone concerned."

Some observers say the government poked holes in Microsoft's credibility and weakened the company's ability to prevail.

Moreover, the government settled a suit against Microsoft in 1995, but went to court because it believed the company violated the agreement. It is considered unlikely to settle for any conduct remedy that it believes would be easily open to abuse and require continuing court action to enforce. The government lost an attempt to enforce the 1995 decree in appeals court.

States Dislike First Microsoft Settlement Bid

Microsoft has made a proposal to settle its antitrust case but it was nowhere near acceptable to the states suing the software giant, a state attorney general said Wednesday.

''It was a minimalist opening offer," California Attorney General Bill Lockyer told reporters at a meeting of state attorneys general. ''It was far from what anyone in our group would expect to be adequate."

Earlier in the day, Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates told an interviewer in New York that the Redmond, Wash., software firm was willing to discuss settlement ideas.

''There are ongoing discussions and I won't speculate as to the probabilities or anything, but I hope it does get settled," Gates said in an interview with Sir David Frost at an investor conference in New York.

A senior U.S. government official responded: ''It remains to be seen whether this is anything other than another public relations offensive by Microsoft."

California’s Lockyer said he had not seen Microsoft’s offer but it was described to him in a brief conversation with Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller, who is leading an efforts by 19 states on the Microsoft case.

The 19 states have joined the federal government in alleging Microsoft abused monopoly power in the market for software used to operate personal computers. A trial in the case began in October, 1998, and recessed last month until at least mid-April.

Miller will brief the attorneys general involved in the case Thursday during a closed lunch at a meeting of the National Association of Attorneys General.

Told of Lockyer’s comments, Miller said, ‘‘I have no comment on settlement negotiations." A Justice Department spokeswoman also had no comment.

Before adjourning the trial, the judge in the case advised the two sides to use their recess time wisely, which has been interpreted to mean that they should try to settle.

In the Frost interview, Gates reiterated his long-standing position that any settlement would have to preserve Microsoft’s "ability to innovate Windows, the ability to maintain the integrity of Windows as a fully designed product.

‘‘As long as we can keep those intact it would be great to settle the thing," Gates said at the Scroders/Variety media conference in New York. He gave no hints about areas where Microsoft might be willing to give ground.

The government settled a suit against Microsoft in 1995, with the company agreeing to change its business practices. But the government later went to court because it believed the company violated the agreement. The government lost on appeal.

Justice Department officials have refused to discuss what they might seek in a settlement. But state attorneys general have said any remedy agreed between the parties would have to be stronger than the 1995 agreement.

Michigan Attorney General Jennifer Granholm, who was also attending the National Association of Attorneys General in Washington, said her colleagues ‘‘want something with teeth, something that works, unlike the previous agreement."

On the other hand, she said, the state attorneys general "don’t want to disembowel the company," and noted its contributions to the computer industry and the global economy.

Microsoft Talks To Begin in Earnest

Negotiations with Microsoft Corp. to try to settle its federal antitrust case will begin in earnest early next week, a state attorney general who is among those suing the software giant said Thursday.

Attorneys general for the 19 states suing the company along with the Justice Department met privately Thursday at a downtown Washington hotel to discuss the four-page proposal Microsoft sent earlier this week.

Chances of any settlement remain slim, after the company's initial overture was described by California Attorney General Bill Lockyer as a ''minimalist opening offer." The government indicated it will make a counteroffer but didn't disclose details.

Justice lawyers didn't participate in Thursday's meeting, and the state attorneys general agreed to remain silent about what was going on.

But New Mexico's attorney general, Patricia Madrid, disclosed to reporters that the settlement talks will begin Tuesday, noting as she made that announcement that Microsoft had supported her opponent during the November election campaign.

Others on the government's side confirmed the timing of the talks, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Microsoft shares climbed Thursday to a record high of $180, up more than 5 percent. It previously announced a 2-for-1 stock split will occur Monday. When the government filed its antitrust case last year, the company traded near $85.

Earlier Thursday, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates visited Washington for the first time since June, but he did not meet with any government officials or even discuss the trial.

Instead, Gates told business students at Georgetown University how technology can make companies more efficient, the subject of his new book. He said the newest employees understand and embrace the latest high-tech tools because they're most comfortable using them.

''It's really the students who are driving this into business," Gates said. ''There's no way that management, especially senior management, can get into their mind how important this is unlessethey're using it."

Microsoft indicated earlier thir week that in a bid to settle the antitrust case it would consider changing some of its most controversial agreements with computer makers and Internet providers, such as letting computer companies hide easy access to Internet software bundled with its dominant Windows operating system.

But Microsoft said it won't accept restrictions on what new features it can add to Windows. The government accuses the company of illegally using Windows' popularity to extend its considerable influence into new areas of technology and crush fledgling rivals.

Microsoft declined to discuss details of the pending negotiations Thursday. Spokesman Mark Murray said ''all the parties need to treat them as confidential" if they are to succeed.

''We stand ready to discuss a wide range of ideas and potential solutions with the government," Murray said. ''At the government's request, we have provided a proposal to serve as a framework."

U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno also declined to discuss Microsoft's offer. ''I think the best thing to do is to let the lawyers who are directly involved comment," she said at her weekly news conference.

The state attorneys general met for more than one hour in a hotel conference room as Iowa's Tom Miller described the company's offer. Lockyer

of California dismissed that offer Wednesday as ‘‘far from what anyone in our group would expect to be adequate" before his peers urged him not to discuss it further.

‘‘We have an obligation, if we’re talking settlement - and if there are serious settlement discussions - to keep them confidential," said Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal.

Madrid of New Mexico noted that Microsoft gave $2,500 just days before the election to her campaign opponent, who was fined $17,500 for failing to report that gift and two others.

The trial, in a lengthy recess, is tentatively scheduled to resume April 12, but it may not start again until mid-May because the judge is hearing another case.

The states suing Microsoft are California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Utah, West Virginia and Wisconsin. South Carolina dropped out of the case.

Symantec Offers Security for Pentium III

Symantec today announced a patch to disable a program designed to swipe serial numbers off Pentium III processors less than a week after the hack was first announced.

Anti-virus software firm Symantec is providing "detection and elimination" of the Pentium III hack on its Web site, where users can download it. The patch will also be available with the regular weekly virus definitions, the company said.

Even before Intel released its Pentium III processor, hackers were itching to prove that the processor serial number hard-wired into each chip could be retrieved without a user’s knowledge, despite Intel’s software utility which is designed to turn the ability to read the number off.

The Pentium III’s controversial processor serial number has turned into something of a public-relations nightmare. The serial number gives each computer a unique form of identification. Although Intel says it included the code to provide an extra layer of security for e-commerce transactions, among other uses, privacy advocates have said the features exposes users’ Web behavior to unscrupulous types. Programmers, meanwhile, have turned the undermining of Intel’s security effort into a popular pastime.

After a German technology publication announced it had come up with a theoretical method of retrieving the identification information, a Canadian security firm, Zero-Knowledge Systems, last week announced it had developed an actual ActiveX control which tricks a user into restarting the computer, and then grabs the serial code before the Intel utility can disable it.

Essentially, Symantec has disabled the control which disables Intel’s software utility, a utility which was made to "turn off" the Pentium III serial code. Where will it end? Who knows, but the latest move has taken place on the chessboard.

"If they say it’s hack-proof, they throw down the gauntlet," said Rob Enderle, an analyst with Giga Information Group. "Anything that exists in software is breakable."

"People love to show that something can be done," said Carey Nachenberg, chief researcher for Symantec. "And once they’ve shown it can be done, they move onto something else."

Don’t expect privacy groups, which are so up in arms about the inclusion of identifying information on the processor that many have called for a boycott of Intel, to be mollified by Symantec’s solution.

"This is symptomatic of the privacy arms race that consumers who want to protect their privacy have to start fighting," said Jason Catlett, president of Junkbusters, a privacy group which has called for a boycott of Intel and is supporting a complaint to the Federal Trade Commission about the serial code. "The consumer is expected to keep spending more and more money on taking evasive action and using technology to protect their privacy."

Catlett called the Pentium III "an obvious target of attack for attackers," because of Intel’s prominence.

While the Symantec patch provides an immediate fix, "Intel can fix this problem completely and reliably by removing the Pentium III Serial Number feature permanently," he said. "That’s what they should do, instead of having a stream of vulnerabilities found and then patched."

"I doubt that Intel is going to capitulate," Enderle said.

Symantec offered a definition of the ActiveX control for its users, Nachenberg said, noting that the so-called "Trojan horse," probably poses no real harm to users. ActiveX and Java controls that trick users into certain behavior are "sociological, not technological," viruses, which are easy to develop but difficult to actually implement.

"There’s so many other things you can do with an ActiveX control--reformat a hard drive, steal quarterly numbers, ship a spreadsheet to Bulgaria--this is minor," he said.

Intel has reiterated this sentiment, insisting that anyone capable of writing this type of malicious code can wreak much worse damage on a user’s system. "Obviously, Symantec is doing what they’re good at, which is helping prevent malicious code," said George Alfs, an Intel spokesman, recommending that all PC users install similar antivirus software.

Privacy Software Raises Concerns

It’s a growth industry: Software that claims to protect the identity of Internet users by letting them control how much personal information they allow Web sites to access.

New technology, promoted by software makers such as Novell and Microsoft, is a growing part of the Internet industry’s campaign to assure people that confidential information like their age, buying habits and income won’t be

misused by Web sites they do business with.

So far the software products have received mixed reviews. Some electronic privacy advocates praise the efforts, but others fear the technology may actually entice Net users to divulge more personal data than they ordinarily would by creating a routine for supplying the information to online vendors.

‘‘We’re fairly skeptical about a lot of these so-called privacy technologies, because a lot of what it comes down to is marketing," said David Banisar of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a Washington-based privacy advocacy group.

‘‘You provide a lot of information into the system, but then it makes it easier for Web sites to obtain the information."

Some privacy activists said Novell Corp. may be moving in the right direction with a product unveiled Monday that appears to strike a balance between collecting information and protecting it.

The Digital Me software would let Net surfers create distinct online identities, allowing a user to enter a certain profile to show an online retailer, another to share with friends and another that retains anonymity.

Novell hopes its technology will be accepted as a standard for controlling personal information. Financial services giant Citigroup has agreed to test services based on the new technology.

Beth Givens, project director at Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, a consumer group based in San Diego, praised the Novell software for allowing users to retain their anonymity. But she expressed concerns about making it easier for online businesses to collect personal information about online users.

‘‘I think everyone who participates in these services should think long-term about ... collection of data about themselves."

Microsoft Corp., for its part, bought a privacy software developer last year, Firefly, that makes a product that also encourages people to create online profiles that get sent to Web sites they visit.

The information would only be made available to Web sites that are certified by industry privacy watchdogs such as Trust-E or the Council of Better Business Bureaus’ online unit, said Saul Klein, Microsoft’s group program manager for Web platform services.

The Microsoft plan is intended to fit in with a broad initiative by the World Wide Web Consortium, a nonprofit group that sets standards for Internet technology to create a common way for Web sites and users to control the information they share with online companies. But Klein said Microsoft hasn’t yet decided how to use the technology.

The ability of industry-supported groups to objectively police Web sites’ privacy policies came under question Monday when Trust-E, which is financed partly by Microsoft, chided the company over a glitch in its software but took no further action.

That’s one reason reason consumer groups say federal legislation is needed to prevent companies from infringing on the privacy of Internet users. A proliferation of software is letting businesses easily ‘‘mine" personal data about consumers by sifting through detailed information to more

precisely target business prospects.

The technology can track a computer user’s recently visited Web sites, the pages the user looked at and even the person’s hobbies - and then link that information to the user’s name and address.

AOL May Cut Up to 1,000 Jobs

America Online Inc., after initially saying it would keep the operations of Netscape autonomous, is taking firm steps to make its imprint on the newly acquired software pioneer.

AOL announced Wednesday it would cut up to 1,000 of the combined company’s 12,000 employees, including up to 20 percent of Netscape’s staff, in a broad realignment that creates four new divisions. AOL, the largest Internet access provider and online service, completed its purchase of Netscape last week for about $10 billion.

AOL is ‘‘pulling them in a bit more than they had indicated originally," said Zia Daniell Wigder, an analyst with New York-based Jupiter Communications Inc. But, she said, ‘‘the reorganization was to some degree anticipated with this type of an acquisition."

America Online decided there were more opportunities to merge staffs than when the deal was proposed last fall, said Barry Schuler, a top AOL executive who will run the combined company’s Internet Web sites and online services.

While the two companies have different audiences - Netscape caters more to business users while AOL targets consumers - AOL wants to broaden sales by selling to both.

‘‘We just found a lot of synergies in where we want to go with AOL," Schuler said in a telephone interview from Netscape’s headquarters in Mountain View, Calif.

The integration reflects, in part, AOL’s aggressive plans to increase development and distribution of Netscape’s once-dominant software for finding and retrieving Web information. That could reinvigorate the browser’s market share, which was surpassed by Internet Explorer after Microsoft Corp. (Nasdaq:MSFT - news) gave it away.

America Online, one of the most influential companies in cyberspace, may try to convince computer manufacturers to carry Netscape’s browser, Schuler said.

‘‘AOL has extremely strong consumer marketing clout," Wigder said. ‘‘They are in a pretty good position to indicate to PC manufacturers how they should be positioning themselves."

However, AOL plans to continue to feature Microsoft’s Internet Explorer software as the preferred browser for jumping subscribers of its proprietary online service to the broader Internet. That’s because Microsoft, in exchange, has agreed to give AOL a prominent link in the Windows operating system, which runs 90 percent of the world’s personal computers.

Most of Netscape’s remaining staff will still work at the company’s headquarters, but the new units will merge workers from both companies and managers may be asked to split their time with AOL’s Dulles, Va. base. At the same time, AOL is eliminating up to 500 of Netscape’s 2,500 workers, largely in administrative positions such as accounting.

America Online is forming four new groups: Interactive Services, which includes AOL’s online services, Netcenter and Netscape’s browser; Interactive Properties, which includes AOL’s production of news and entertainment and its ICQ messaging software; Netscape Enterprises, which includes Netscape’s business software; and AOL International, which includes the overseas operations of America Online and its CompuServe unit.

Shares of AOL, dropped $3.871/2, or 3 percent, to close at $117.121/2. It was the most actively traded stock on the New York Stock Exchange.

Microsoft Milestone Reveals Earlier Exaggeration

Microsoft Corp. said Wednesday its new Web browsing software had been downloaded by more than 1 million people in record time, forcing executives to admit the software giant exaggerated public response to the previous version released in 1997.

In a news release, Microsoft declared that customer downloads of IE5, which was released Thursday for free distribution over the Internet, ‘‘more than tripled those of the previous record-setting Internet Explorer 4.0."

But oddly, a Microsoft executive said IE5 did not pass the 1 million mark until the fifth day after the product launch. Back in October 1997 Microsoft trumpeted the fact that IE4 exceeded 1 million downloads in just two days, marking a new record.

The figures should have been comparable because in both cases they represented only customers who downloaded the software through Microsoft’s own Web site, excluding the many partner sites where the product can be found.

In an interview, Microsoft product manager Mike Nichols explained that the 1 million figure announced in 1997 had been achieved by counting anyone who downloaded a tiny piece of code for the browser called the ‘‘Active Setup executable."

Only a small percentage of those people actually had completed the process of downloading the massive Web browser itself at the time of the announcement, he said -- a fact never previously disclosed.

‘‘With IE5 we made the choice to be more rigorous and count only complete downloads," he said. ‘‘Either way you measure it, IE5 is more than triple the downloads" of the previous version.

The disclosure of the misleading news release provides a glimpse into how Microsoft used its marketing machine to buttress efforts to increase its share of the Internet browser market, which in October 1997 still was dominated by archrival Netscape Communications Corp.

Executives of both companies say the browser market now is split about evenly between the two companies, although Netscape, now a unit of Internet

giant America Online Inc., contends its browser still holds a substantial lead in the business market.

The 1997 release of IE4 also came as the Justice Department was intensifying its investigation of Microsoft’s business practice but before it accused the software giant of improperly forcing computer makers to install the browser along with the company’s market-dominating Windows operating system.

The government lost that case but then filed a much broader antitrust action against Microsoft that is the subject of a landmark trial, currently in recess.

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates said Wednesday the company is in ongoing talks to settle the litigation. Microsoft’s image has taken a beating at the trial, where government lawyers have scored courtroom points by challenging the credibility of the company’s executives on the witness stand.

Microsoft has defended its actions in part by saying it has integrated the Web browser ever more tightly with Windows to satisfy customer demand.

Prodigy Brings Online Shopping To Life with Marketplace Mystery Sweepstakes

Prodigy Communications Corporation recently announced the Grand Reopening of the Prodigy Mall and with it the Marketplace Mystery Sweepstakes, an interactive sweepstakes designed to help build traffic and familiarize Prodigy Internet members with online products and services available at the Marketplace.

In the Marketplace Mystery Sweepstakes, Prodigy Internet members are provided clues to help locate misplaced products from four separate online retailers: Travelocity.com, PC Flowers & Gifts, eToys, and American Greetings. By following the clues, members will gather the answers to enter into the sweepstakes. Prodigy Internet members playing the game will become familiar with the eTailers in the Prodigy Mall and learn more about shopping over the Internet.

Once they solve the mystery, Prodigy members are entered into the sweepstakes to win a number of prizes, including: two roundtrip tickets on American Airlines courtesy of Travelocity.com; Sony Playstations and Nintendo 64 systems, from eToys; plus other great prizes from American Greetings and PC Flowers.

The sweepstakes is also timed so members have an incentive to experience the redesigned Prodigy Mall as they consider purchases for such upcoming holidays as Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. The goal is for members to bookmark the Prodigy Mall as the place to go the next time they consider a purchase. The Prodigy Mall is a comprehensive shopping resource with discounts, specials, and over 50 brand-name stores and boutiques.

"The Prodigy Marketplace is one of the many ways that Prodigy brings the value of the Internet to our members," said David Trachtenberg, president and COO of Prodigy. "Shopping online can be intimidating for those who have never tried it before, and the Marketplace Mystery sweepstakes was devised as a way to introduce our members to the world of e-commerce and show them how safe, fun, and easy it is to shop online."

Software Start-Up Helps Parents Monitor Their Kids

School children will have a more difficult time skipping classes in the future if a software program that lets parents monitor their children catches on.

A start-up company called SchoolSoft, based in Cupertino, Calif., unveiled an upgrade to its software that lets parents monitor their child's performance in school over the Internet.

The company has developed software that runs on 3Com Corp.'s popular PalmPilot handheld computers. SchoolSoft resells the PalmPilots to schools, pre-loaded with SchoolSoft software, plus programs to run on a school's network server.

School teachers can then enter into the PalmPilot student attendance data, grades, homework assignments, student and the like, which is sent to the school's central server.

Later, parents with either Internet access or just a telephone can access the school's server for updates from the teacher. Before the software upgrade, parents could only access the system via the telephone.

Jim Weldon, SchoolSoft founder and chief executive, said the company at present had an installed base of about 330 schools around the United States, and that the software was used for children in kindergarten all the way up to secondary school.

''In high school, parents really want to track activities, grades, et cetera -- how do they get on track to go to college?" said Weldon. ''Children also have access as well to their academic records...Sometimes you don't know where you are (academically)."

When asked if many children have objected to their parents using the software, Weldon said that most are aware of the advantages the software can provide, such as letting them know about grades and performance issues in school -- long before report cards arrive.

The server software costs an average of about $20,000 for a school and the PalmPilots average about $360 a year per user, That is more than the typical PalmPilot, but also the package includes the pre-loaded SchoolSoft software and training for school staff.

Closely held SchoolSoft is three years old and was funded by Weldon, his brothers and another individual investor.

Microsoft Browser May Edge Netscape

Microsoft's new Internet Explorer 5.0 software makes navigating the World Wide Web faster and easier, offering minor improvements that could lengthen the software maker's lead over Netscape's once-dominant Navigator.

The Web browser released Thursday features a ‘‘radio toolbar" that allows a user to listen to radio broadcasts over the Internet and still continue browsing. Microsoft Corp. says the software also uses less hard disk space on the computer and simplifies many tasks that tended to confound novice users.

Except for minor cosmetic differences, the new browser looks much the same as version 4.0, which was released in September 1997 and enmeshed in Windows 98, launched last June.

But the improvements could give Microsoft an extra edge over Netscape’s Navigator, the first widely used Internet browser that has withered in the face of Microsoft’s bruising counterattack. The struggling Internet pioneer was bought by America Online for $9.8 billion on Wednesday.

Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser edged Navigator’s market share in 1998. IE had 43.8 percent of the market vs. Netscape’s 41.5 percent last fall, according to International Data Corp. A year earlier, IE had 39 percent vs. 50.5 percent for Navigator.

Microsoft is battling a government antitrust suit that accuses it of illegally tying its browser to its Windows operating software to squeeze out rivals, notably Netscape. Windows runs roughly 90 percent of the world’s personal computers.

Netscape is expected to bring out a new version of its Navigator later this year.

‘‘They’ve got the ability to get their browser out. We’ve got the ability to get our browser out. At the end of the day, users choose," Microsoft chairman Bill Gates said at a low-key ceremony at the company’s television studios here.

The new software, the fifth version of Internet Explorer, will be the centerpiece of an upgrade to the Windows 98 operating system this fall.

Several analysts say the new launch helps keep the product fresh.

The new version is necessary, said analyst Rick Sherlund of Goldman Sachs & Co., to keep giving consumers compelling reasons to buy new computers - especially since more people are buying inexpensive machines intended primarily for e-mail and Internet use.

‘‘The biggest risk Microsoft has is not the Department of Justice, it’s stagnation of technology," Sherlund said.

‘‘It doesn’t appear to be a quantum leap, but it will help them," said Scott McAdams, president of McAdams Wright Ragen in Seattle.

Microsoft distributes its browser free, and made Internet Explorer 5.0 available over its Web site just after midnight. Company officials did not immediately have figures on the number of copies downloaded.

Gates said the new browser is easy for Internet businesses to customize with their own features. Microsoft announced that six leading Web destinations - AltaVista, Excite, Lycos, Go Network, Snap and Yahoo! - plus its own Microsoft Network, were creating customized versions of Internet Explorer for their users.

For example, Vista will provide foreign language translation of Web pages.

It also will offer Vista Tracker, a personalized window in the browser that is constantly updated with news, weather, sports and stock information, no matter where else a user might go on the Web.

This fall, Microsoft will bring out Windows 98 Special Edition, an upgrade that will incorporate Internet Explorer 5.0 and other new technologies, most notably, Internet Connection Sharing.

That technology will allow consumers to run up to four different computers simultaneously over a single Internet access account. It is aimed at multiple computer families where parents and kids compete for Internet time.

Web Management Co. Raises Feds' Ire

The government is demanding an explanation from the company that assigns most of the world's Internet addresses, after it moved quietly to steer customers of an important Web directory to its private commercial site.

''We're very concerned," said Becky Burr, administrator with the Commerce Department. ''This was undertaken without consultation with the United States government."

People trying to visit the popular ''Internic.Net" directory - which checks the availability of a new Web address - are unexpectedly being swept automatically to the home page for Network Solutions Inc., which offers to register Internet addresses with the com, net or org suffixes for $119.

The company has remarkable authority over the Internet stemming from its exclusive government contract. It made the surprise change as the government moves to largely end its role managing the global computer network and hands responsibility over to a non-profit group, the California-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

''The community has had it (Internic) for a long time, and they're used to having it for a reference tool," Michael Roberts, the group's president, said from Los Angeles. ''Whether this sort of brute-force approach to closing it is appropriate, there are a lot of questions. The manner in which they did it seemed pretty inappropriate."

Roberts said he expects to talk Friday with Network Solutions about its decision.

The government is upset because the information directory has traditionally been considered a community resource, like a giant telephone book for the Web, and because it owns Internic as a registered trademark.

''Our view is, this information has been freely available to the Internet community for a long time," Burr said. ''If there is some reason to change that, we need to be consulted."

The change, which occurred overnight last Friday, infuriated some Internet groups. It illustrates the challenges of diluting the influence of Network Solutions and turning over to private industry the job of running the Internet, which is quickly becoming the most crucial communications medium for the digital age.

Hundreds e-mailed the Commerce Department to complain.

‘‘We’re entering a very uncertain period," said Jay Fenello, president of Iperdome Inc., an Internet company. ‘‘There are serious questions about how this transition will move forward. This is just a symptom of that."

Network Solutions, based in Herndon, Va., has enjoyed a lucrative, exclusive government agreement to register Internet addresses since 1993. It has assigned more than 4 million Web sites and had $93.7 million in sales last year.

Its decision to quietly steer visitors from Internic to its own site comes just before Roberts’ group was expected to select five companies that will compete with Network Solutions in assigning Web addresses.

‘‘They’re trying to get as much visibility with customers as they can for as long as they can," complained William Walsh of Fresno, Calif., who runs DSO Net, another Internet company.

‘‘They’re going to brand their registrar service as the Internic before there are even other registrars that could compete," Walsh said. ‘‘It may be legal, but it speaks of ethical problems."

A spokesman for Network Solutions, Chris Clough, said the Internic information directory is legally a customer list owned by his company. He said the company decided last weekend to consolidate several Web sites it maintained, including Internic.Net, to anticipate changes in how the Internet will be managed.

But Roberts said late Tuesday that confusion over the switch might delay his organization’s selection of which companies eventually will compete to assign Web addresses.

Some applicants have already complained that the change by Network Solutions is causing them technical problems.

‘‘It’s sufficiently serious that we’re considering delaying our deadline to give people more time," said Roberts.

U.S. Congress Offers Y2K Help To Small Businesses

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Tuesday to set up a $500 million loan program to help small businesses fix their computers before the so-called millennium bug strikes on Jan. 1.

The Small Business Year 2000 Readiness Act, approved in the Republican-controlled House by voice vote, would help employers around the country buy new computers or upgrade their old ones to eliminate the glitch, which could cause systems to crash or malfunction.

The same bill was approved earlier this month by the Senate. It must now be signed into law by President Clinton.

Under the legislation, sponsored by Missouri Republican Sen. Christopher Bond, loans would also be made available to help small business owners if major suppliers, customers or creditors experience year 2000 computer breakdowns.

The millennium problem, commonly referred to as Y2K for year 2000, arises because many older computers record dates using only the last two digits of the year. If left uncorrected, such systems could treat the year 2000 as the year 1900, generating errors or system crashes on Jan. 1, 2000.

U.S. lawmakers are considering several bills to help companies and the public deal with the computer bug, but few initiatives have as widespread support as Bond’s.

Democrats and Republicans say thousands of small businesses are too strapped for cash to upgrade their older computers or to buy new ones.

A recent study by the National Federation of Independent Business found that 4.75 million small employers face Y2K problems. It warned that 750,000 of them could be forced to shut down or would be severely crippled if their computers were not fixed in time.

Bond’s bill would require the Small Business Administration to quickly establish a temporary ‘‘Y2K loan program," which would make available about $500 million in loans through Dec. 31, 2000. Aides said the average loan would be for about $25,000, and would target firms with between five and 25 employees.

U.S. Hacker Mitnick Reaches Plea Deal

Computer hacker Kevin Mitnick, who was due to stand trial this month on software theft charges, has reached a plea deal with federal prosecutors, a published report said Thursday.

Mitnick, a 35-year-old Los Angeles native who has been in federal custody since 1995, could be a free man in about a year and would be barred from profiting from his story, the Los Angeles Times reported.

He was charged under a 25-count indictment that included 14 counts of wire fraud and eight counts of illegal possession of computer files stolen from such companies as Motorola Inc. and Sun Microsystems Inc.

The Times reported Mitnick would enter a plea of guilty and also would be barred from using computers for about three years after his release from prison. The Times said the deal still must be approved by a federal judge.

A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Los Angeles declined to comment on the report. Mitnick’s lawyer could not be reached for comment. His trial was due to begin March 29.

Mitnick’s exploits as a hacker and his flight from justice captured the attention of the U.S. press and inspired an upcoming Hollywood movie.

FBI agents arrested him in North Carolina in 1995 after he spent more than two years as a fugitive.

The Times reported his plea deal with prosecutors would call for a prison term of about five years. But with the time he already has served and credit for good behavior behind bars, he could be out within about one year.

Mitnick was arrested four times for hacking during the 1980s and previously served a one-year prison term.

He was on probation in 1992 when he began hacking again, prosecutors said. He fled on Christmas Eve 1992 and remained a fugitive until his capture.

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